

Thanks to each of you for holding this hearing on the upcoming farm bill in North Carolina. My name is Larry Martin and I am a farmer that produces corn, soybeans and wheat in the district of our distinguished Congressman Butterfield. I am also Advisor to the Wayne County Farm Service Agency committee.

I am here on the behalf of myself and other farmers, particularly Black, Native American and Small Farmers. I also represent different minority cooperatives and community based organizations located across the state. I belong to twin rivers co-op located in Rose Hill, NC. I am the secretary of the organization.

My concerns and those of the groups I represent are many. You have a copy of our concerns. I will briefly highlight the issues.

Conservation Programs Findings – NRCS

- Many of the acres of land owned by Black Farmers are erodible land and wetlands, Small farms with small tracks and small fields.
- Local committees at the county offices approved or set priority for those to receive cost sharing, financial and technical assistance. Many Black Farmers did not receive benefits because of their race and the size of their farm.
- Small farms can not compete with large farms to receive cost share funds from NRCS because of the point system to receive assistance.

Recommendation

- Continue and expand the small farm initiative program under NRCS. Like farms would compete for funds.

Credit Findings

- The lack of farm credit to black farmers is one of the major reasons black farmers have declined from 14.4 percent in 1910 to less than one percent today
- If black farmers' did receive loans through FSA, they lost their land through discrimination practices by FSA. Delinquent loan procedure was not applied the same to all races. Black Farmers are still losing land as a result of these actions.
- Loan application process through FSA is too complicated for the average person to understand.
- Loans form FSA are not approved timely.
- Credit worthiness has been lost because of injustices

Recommendation

- Put a moratorium on Black Farmers foreclosures for the next three years. This also includes interest accrual.
- USDA should develop and implement a policy that would restore credit to Black Farmers.
- Provide Black Farmers the First right of refusal on USDA inventory lands.
- Diversify the management team of FSA loan employees.

FSA County Committee Findings

- The county committee makes determinations on program participation, program violations and hiring managers. In many instances the committees do not reflect the population of the county. The committee is assigned the task of appointing an advisor to the committee to represent underserved farmers. In many situations the person appointed does not represent the underserved community. Appointments to the state committee also fall in the same category. Also, the appointee does not have voting power; what kind of representation is that?

Recommendation

- State committee and county committee appointments be done in accordance with consultation with the Black Agriculture leadership and community based organizations. Local administrative areas, LAA should be redrawn to reflect the population. This can be done administratively if enforced.

Land Grant Universities 1890's

- In 1890, congress created the 1890 land grant universities to educate and service Blacks. This service is still needed.
- 1890 institutions are under funded. In North Carolina, North Carolina A&T State University, a 1890 institution received 6 million dollars in state funds and North Carolina State University received 62 million. Big difference in funding.

Recommendation

- Fund 1890's at an adequate level to enable these institutions to implement the same programs currently supported at the 1862's

Commodity Crops and Marketing Findings

- Socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers grow a higher proportion of non-commodity crops than the general farm population; thus their support from federal programs is less than most.
- Many Black Farmers produced tobacco however; the tobacco buyout has eliminated most Black tobacco farmers.
- These farmers are producing specialty crops and livestock that do not have safety net programs.

- The infrastructure to support these new adventures are not in place, such as slaughtering facilities
- Many Black Farmers lost commodity bases because they were not aware that the operator of the farm did not enroll in the AMTA program.

Recommendation

- Provide safety net program for specialty crops similar to commodity programs.
- Develop incentives to construct needed infrastructure for the farming changes.
- Allow farmers the opportunity to enroll their farm in safety net programs where bases were lost due to misinformation or hardships that can be documented.

Programs and Outreach Findings

- Outreach is the most important component of USDA services. Lack of outreach in USDA has contributed to many of the problems such as loss of land and farms to the minority community.
- 2501 program which was designed to assist in providing outreach and technical assistance to Black Farmers is badly underfunded. There is so much competition for the funds and not many funds available that the program is losing its effectiveness.
- USDA agencies outreach programs with FSA, NRCS and RD do not reach the Black community. Other options should be tried.

Recommendations

- Fund 2501 program at an adequate level
- Fund USDA agencies with outreach monies, with the stipulation that community based organizations assist in the development of the outreach plan. Obviously the present system is not working.
- Diversify the staff in these offices. Studies have shown that diversified staff significantly improves outreach impact.